



**Defining Workplace Violence**  
**Workplace Violence Prevention and Response Guidelines**  
**AISIS International, September, 2005**

Any definition of workplace violence must be broad enough to encompass the full range of behaviors that can cause injury, damage property, impede the normal course of work, or make workers, managers, and customers fear for their safety. Workplace violence is defined as follows:

Workplace violence refers to a broad range of behaviors falling along a spectrum that, due to their nature and/or severity, significantly affect the workplace, generate a concern for personal safety, or result in physical injury or death. At the low end of the workplace violence spectrum lie disruptive, aggressive, hostile, or emotionally abusive behaviors that generate anxiety or create a climate of distrust, and that adversely affect productivity and morale. These behaviors of concern could – but will not necessarily – escalate into more severe behavior falling further along the workplace violence spectrum.

Further along the spectrum are words or other actions that are reasonably perceived to be intimidating, frightening, or threatening to employees and that generate a justifiable concern for personal safety. These behaviors include, among others, direct, conditional or veiled threats, stalking, and aggressive harassment.

At the high end of the spectrum are acts of overt violence causing physical injury. These acts include non-fatal physical assaults with or without weapons – including pushing, shoving, hitting, kicking, or biting – and, in the worst cases, lethal violence inflicted by shooting, stabbing, bombing or any other deadly means.

In addition to acts that frighten or harm others, workplace violence includes threats or damage to company property and words or actions indicating that an employee might harm him or herself at the workplace.

Where threatening or violent behavior is motivated by a characteristic that is legally protected against discrimination (*e.g.*, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and so forth), workplace violence includes conduct that can generate a “hostile work environment” as legally defined under prevailing discrimination and harassment laws.